

The style and
technique used in o.
henry's selected short
stories



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This chapter presents the Review of Related Literature and Studies. These are researches connected to the study that the researchers are conducting. The Review of Related Literature contains the information about the five selected short stories, the biography of the author, and the literary approach that is to be used. The Review of Related Studies contains the studies conducted by other researchers that are related to the study. These studies are the analyses and reviews of the short stories.

Related Literature

This part includes: the summary of the five selected short stories – The Gift of the Magi, The Last Leaf, The Ransom of Red Chief, A Retrieved Reformation and The Clarion Call to give the readers a brief picture of the stories, the author's biography so as to give the readers an account of their lives and inspirations, and the literary techniques pertaining to style and theme to let the readers understand how the research is being conducted.

Synopses The Gift of the Magi Jim and Della are a husband and wife living in a rented room in New York.

They are quite poor and recently Jim has had his salary cut back to only \$20 a week from the \$30 a week he used to make. After rent and groceries, the couple hardly have any money left. Christmas is only a day away and, for a Christmas present, Della wants to buy Jim a gold watch chain for his gold watch. They do not have much to be proud or happy about, but Jim is very proud of that watch. And Della? Della is most proud of her beautiful long hair. But she really wants to buy that gold chain for Jim's watch. Too bad she

only has \$1. 87. So, she decides to sell her hair to a woman who makes wigs and other hair articles.

The woman pays Della \$20 for her hair. The chain costs \$21, so she now has enough money. She buys the chain to give to Jim. She goes home and prepares Jim's dinner and waits for him to come home, a little bit worried that Jim will be shocked when he sees her with all her beautiful hair cut off. When Jim comes home, he does look shocked when he sees Della with short hair. He stares at her in a strange way and it scares her. She explains to Jim how she sold her hair to buy him a nice Christmas present. Jim tells her not to worry and that nothing can change his love for her.

The reason he is shocked to see her without her long hair is that he also wanted to get a nice Christmas present for Della. He gives her the present wrapped in paper and Della unwraps it to see that Jim had bought her a set of beautiful combs for her hair. She had seen them in a shop before, but they were so expensive. How was Jim able to afford them? Suddenly, she remembers Jim's present. She gives him the gold chain. The chain is beautiful, but when Della asks Jim to put it on his watch, Jim surprises her. He sold the watch to buy her those nice combs.

The Last Leaf This story takes place in New York City where two young women share an apartment. They, like all the tenants in their building, are artists who earn their daily bread making drawings for magazine advertisements. All the artists, though, hope to paint a masterpiece, someday. One of the girls has come down with pneumonia. She isn't in a hospital (as she would be today) but is being nursed by her room-mate. The

doctor has visited the apartment and advises the healthy girl that her ill friend will only recover if she has the will to live.

The sick girl is in bed staring out the window. On this rainy November day, she is staring through the window watching leaves fall from a vine on the opposite building wall. She announces that when the last leaf falls, she will die. The nurse is in a panic. She does her best to bring some cheer, to infuse her friend with the will to live. The sick girl refuses to improve. The healthy girl visits an old artist who lives downstairs. She tells the old drunk that their friend needs a reason to live. He scoffs at this suggestion, and our nurse goes home dejected.

The next day, the last leaf is still on the vine. And, the next day, it's still there. Our patient begins to improve. The doctor visits and gives her a much better chance of survival. But, he lets her know that the old man downstairs is now stricken with pneumonia. They found him in his room sick, wet, and cold. Outside was a ladder and his palette of paints where he had painted a single leaf on the wall. It was the last leaf that had given hope to the sick girl, which had given her the will to live.

The Ransom of Red Chief The story takes place in rural Alabama. Two crooks, Bill Driscoll and Sam (we never learn his last name) have about \$600 between the two of them and figure they need another \$2000 to pull off a “fraudulent town-lot scheme.” And by the way, you learn in the first paragraph of the story that these two fellows are the self-educated type who think that using big words makes them smart. They have it all figured out. Except for the fact that the words they use are wrong or made up,

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accounting for the humor of the undereducated ne'er-do-well who thinks he has a plan.

So Bill and Sam decide that in order to get their money, they'll kidnap a child from a prominent member of a small town and thus select little Johnny Dorset, a boy of nine and the only child of Ebenezer Dorset, a " mortgage fancier. " The trouble starts from the get-go when they call out to Johnny to tempt him to the car. Johnny throws a piece of brick and hits Bill in the eye. The two get out of the car and grab Johnny, who puts up a struggle before they get him in the car and drive out to a cave in the hills. Sam goes to return the car, and when he returns he finds Johnny has become Red Chief – and Bill has bruises on his legs.

Life over the next day doesn't get any better for Bill as little Johnny, who hates school, doesn't like girls, and is generally a little terror, finds the idea of camping out to be great fun and indulges his sadistic imagination on his captors, nearly scalping Bill the next morning, shoving a red hot potato down his shirt and smashing it with his foot, and riding Bill like a horse. It's enough to make Bill announce that his favorite Biblical character is King Herod (who had all the young boys put to death around the time of the birth of Jesus).

And even Sam threatens the boy with taking him back home if he doesn't behave. Sam and Bill then draw up their ransom letter and have it delivered to Ebenezer Dorset demanding \$1500 (Bill insists that no one will pay \$2000 to have Johnny returned). Mr. Dorset responds with a letter of his own telling " Two Desperate Men" that for \$250 he will accept Johnny back, but that they better do it at night as the neighbors believe Johnny is gone for good

and he can't be held responsible for how they'll act if they see him being returned.

Bill begs, and Sam relents. So that night, they take Johnny home. Johnny grabs Bill's leg, holding on for dear life so he isn't returned home. Johnny's dad pries him off. Bill asks how long he can hold Johnny, to which Ebenezer replies he's not as strong as he used to be, so maybe ten minutes, to which Bill replies that by then he should be close to Canada, and takes off running.

A Retrieved Reformation Set in the American Midwest during the early 1900s, "A Retrieved Reformation" concerns the surprising fate of Jimmy Valentine, a skilled young safecracker who returns to society after he is paroled from prison. The story begins at the prison shortly before Jimmy Valentine is set free; the majority of the narrative occurs in Elmore, a small backwoods town in Arkansas where he settles. Major characters include Jimmy Valentine; Mike Dolan, his partner in crime; detective Ben Price, Jimmy's nemesis; and Annabel Adams, the girl with whom Jimmy falls in love.

Minor characters are the prison warden; Cronin, a prison guard; Mr. Adams, Annabel's father; Annabel's sister; Annabel's two young nieces, May and Agatha; a hotel clerk; and a young boy who lives in Elmore. As the story begins, Jimmy is called to the warden's office. The warden hands Jimmy his pardon from the governor and advises him to stay out of trouble: "You're not a bad fellow at heart," he says. "Stop cracking safes, and live straight." Jimmy laughs, feigning surprise, denying he had ever cracked a safe or committed the bank robbery that had sent him to prison.

Jimmy leaves prison the next day and takes a train to another town where he meets up with Mike Dolan, a friend and confederate. After picking up his key from Mike, Jimmy returns to his room above Mike's restaurant where he had lived before detective Ben Price arrested him. Jimmy finds his safe cracking tools still hidden in the wall where he had left them. A week later, a string of bank safe burglaries in the Midwest comes to Ben Price's attention; he knows Jimmy Valentine is back in business and sets out to catch him again.

Meanwhile, carrying his burglar tools in a suitcase, Jimmy arrives in small, remote Elmore, Arkansas, where he plans to rob the bank. Walking toward the hotel, he encounters a beautiful young woman. Their eyes meet, and in that instant, Jimmy undergoes a complete reformation: " Jimmy Valentine looked into her eyes, forgot what he was, and became another man. " After talking to a boy on the street, Jimmy learns she is Annabel Adams, whose father owns the bank. Jimmy continues on to the hotel, where he registers as " Ralph D. Spencer."

In a conversation with the hotel clerk, Jimmy learns that Elmore does not have a shoe store and that business is good in the town. Jimmy Valentine does not rob the bank; instead, " Ralph Spencer" settles in Elmore, opens a profitable shoe store, becomes a social success, and makes the acquaintance of Annabel Adams. A year elapses. Still using his " Ralph Spencer" alias, Jimmy enjoys great success. His business is growing, he and Annabel are soon to be married, and Annabel's father and sister have accepted him as one of the family.

To cut completely the ties with his past, Jimmy writes a letter to one of his former friends, asking the man to meet him in Little Rock. Jimmy plans to give the man his set of safe cracking tools. The day before Jimmy is to leave for Little Rock, Ben Price arrives in Elmore, spots Jimmy Valentine, and learns he is about to marry the banker's daughter. Ben Price has other ideas. The next day before leaving town, with his burglar tools in his suitcase, Jimmy goes to the bank with Annabel, Annabel's sister, and the sister's two little girls, May and Agatha.

Annabel's father wants to show off the new burglar-proof safe he has recently installed. While all are admiring the safe, Ben Price comes into the bank and watches the scene; he tells a bank teller " he was just waiting for a man he knew. " Jimmy is unaware of the detective's presence. Without warning, May playfully locks Agatha in the bank vault, throwing the bolts and spinning the combination lock as she had seen her grandfather perform the maneuver. The safe cannot be opened, Mr. Adams exclaims in horror, since the timer and the combination had not been set. Furthermore, Agatha will soon run out of air in the vault.

Jimmy and the others can hear Agatha crying out in panic. Annabel turns to Jimmy, begging him to do something, at least to try. Jimmy looks at Annabel with a " soft smile. " He asks her for the rose she is wearing. Confused, Annabel hands him the rose. Jimmy puts the rose in his vest pocket, throws off his coat, and pushes up his shirtsleeves: " With that act Ralph D. Spencer passed away and Jimmy Valentine took his place. " Using his tools, Jimmy opens the safe in record time, freeing the sobbing child. Once Agatha is safe,

Jimmy puts on his coat and walks away; he hears Annabel call out to him, but he does not stop.

When he encounters Ben Price, who has witnessed the dramatic scene, Jimmy tells the detective, “ Well, let’s go. I don’t know that it makes much difference, now. ” Price, who seems to be acting rather oddly, replies, “ Guess you’re mistaken, Mr. Spencer Don’t believe I recognize you. ” With that, the detective leaves. “ A Retrieved Reformation” was published in 1909 in O. Henry’s book of short stories, *Roads of Destiny*. It features several of the narrative elements for which O. Henry’s short stories are well known. The surprise ending is especially characteristic of O. Henry’s tales, as are the story’s numerous gentle ironies.

Jimmy Valentine leaves prison with no thought of leading a conventional, respectable life, and he comes to Elmore to rob the bank. Instead, he falls in love with the banker’s daughter, finds a new family, runs a flourishing shoe store (having learned to make shoes in prison), and becomes a pillar in his new community. Furthermore, the special skills he had used in his criminal pursuits enable him to save a little girl’s life. His unlikely reformation is “ retrieved” by the detective most determined to arrest him.